HARAMBEE

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Rap: Images & Responsibility

On a recent edition of "Geraldo," rappers Cool Moe D and Schooly D, and one other whose name I can't recall, as well as Lisa(from the rock group "Lisa, Lisa") were featured on a panel in a discussion of sex- and violence-related lyrics in rap and other popular music. Featured as in-audience panelists were American-born African psychologist Alvin Poussaint and a Caucasian woman who is involved in efforts to have lyrics printed on the outside of album jackets so that parents and their children can know, before they purchase albums, what kinds of messages they're delivering.

During the course of the discussion, Cool Moe D, as he has on other television appearances, expressed the view that rappers, as entertainers and as role models, do have a responsibility to their young fans. While not being explicitly critical of other rappers, he did state that his own sense of responsibility required of him that he, through his music and otherwise, not disrespect those for whom he might be a role model and that he not give them negative messages.

At a number of points during the program, Geraldo played or showed in print segments of rap songs which he characterized as being offensive to women, to Jews, to Africans("blacks"), or which glorified violence. Schooly D, in responding to a question by Geraldo on his(Schooly D's) use of "nigger" in his raps, grinned sheepishly like a child who has been busted by a parent doing something really stupid and something for which there is not even the most bizarre justification. After grinning and giggling, Schooly "explained" that, as an entertainer, he raps what he feels like rapping. When asked about lyrics of his which seemed to demean women, Schooly claimed that his material deals with real life and that, in his reality, women are essentially "meat on a bone." Whether the issue was his people or women, Schooly maintained

the posture of one with no cultural consciousness whatsoever and no sense of responsibility at all. He was a pathetic caricature of himself throughout.

So what do we have? Cool Moe D on one end of the consciousness spectrum and Schooly D on the other? And which of the two is more representative of American-born African rappers in general? How constructively meaningful for us is rap music overall? To what degree is Public Enemy's "Fight The Power" (an uncommonly artistic and significant piece) representative of rap, as compared to "Big Ol' Butt" (the music video of which diminishes the status of Sisters to the level of simple flesh for male sex fantasies)? But how, without doing some kind of exhaustive survey, can we answer any of the above questions?

There is a question, however, that we can take a reasonable stab at answering: Why is rap getting so much attention--particularly, of the negative sort? The answer lies in the American racist phobia regarding strong/aggressive African male images. So long as African men in the U.S. entertainment field are innocuous/non-threatening or effeminate - such as Michael Jackson for example - the media are willing to cut them some slack. But one thing these African men who are rappers tend to have in common is a macho/aggressive image. They are loud and audacious and, frequently, overtly sexual in their demeanor as well as in their raps. To Caucasian America, these men are threatening. They become even more threatening when they, as in the case of Public Enemy, attack American racism, its economic or political system, or other of America's corner stones and sacred cows.

We must be mindful of the fact that sex obsession and violence glorification have been part of the American music industry scene for quite some time, though the latter is a more recent development and one to be found in the music of Caucasian punk rockers more than in other music forms. So the

sex obsession and violence glorification which are to be found in some rap music are not new things. But deep in the collective American psyche, there is this immense Willie Horton image, an African every-man looming to ravage Caucasian womanhood. So when these African male rappers spout their rhymes, they are more threatening to Caucasian America than are their Caucasian counterparts.

But we're not just dealing with some kind of racist psycho-sexual trip. It is not uncommon to find people who jump nervously at every unidentified sound, who are constantly looking back over their shoulders, who have nightmares. And it is not uncommon for the cause of such behavior to be guilt. Those who have wronged people know that, were they to have been themselves wronged, they would try to get justice or/and revenge. So they expect that known or unknown someones will try to get justice from or/and revenge on them. Caucasian America knows that it has wronged us and fears that we will some day exact justice. In its collective psyche, then, macho African male images are quickly interpreted as resurrected Nat Turners.

However, just because racism may underlie much of the Caucasian media's, as well as other Caucasian groups' and individuals', bad-rapping of rap, this does not mean that the demeaning of African people, disrespect of our women, and encouragement of our youth to go after material luxuries at the expense of anyone by some of our rappers can be excused.

We know that it is American institutions which have instilled in many of us a hatred of self and, thus, a hatred of those(other Africans) who resemble us. But if we are attacked by one of our own, we don't excuse the attack. We defend ourselves. And the fact is that we are under attack by some of our rappers. When they speak of us as "niggers," we are under attack. When they speak of

Sisters as being no more than "meat on a bone," we are under attack. When they, knowing that most of our youth are poor and may have no prospect of obtaining gainful employment, sport ounces upon ounces of gold and give the message that the gold gives them value, we are under attack.

But we are not just under attack by some of our rappers. There are many of us in the entertainment field who exhibit the irresponsible and self-hating attitude of a Schooly D, and not only in the entertainment field. Moreover, there are some rappers and other Brothers and Sisters in the public eye who are trying to raise our consciousness, who are trying to give us dignity, who are trying to inspire us. If all this furor over rap music has the capacity to lead to anything constructive, then it should be to open the door to a more general discussion about the responsibilities of our entertainers as a whole and our responsibilities toward them--rewarding and encouraging them when they function in our interests and making them pay a price when they function in a fashion detrimental to us.

In most of the discussions on sex and violence in rap and rock music we witness on television, in the newspapers, and so forth, the issue is censorship vs. the First Amendment. And certainly this is an important issue. But what is a more vital question for us is that of how we are going to rise from the burial ground of self-contempt on one hand and assimilation on the other. Or, to put this more positively, how are we going to rise to the high ground of dignity and self-respect and move toward cultural/spiritual independence? As an African minority in a racist nation, we can ill-afford to leave entertainment, as it relates to us, in the ideological hands of those who can't see beyond questions of censorship and the First Amendment. We have to recognize that there is a direct connection between the kinds of images our entertainers project and the values we hold and actions we perform. We have to, in a collective sense, take this personal.

FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization (parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.), is a pan-Africanist newsletter. The FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any distinction between African people based solely on place of birth. References in the FLAME to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter "black" or other terms designating African people. This is our practice because we do not wish to diminish the integrity and authenticity of the articles we excerpt from.

...

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa (aka David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words, though longer pieces will not be automatically rejected. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. We are looking for poems which address African folks' lives, the conditions we face, and our struggles to rise above those things which hinder us. We are <u>not</u> looking for poems which sacrifice power and beauty for the sake of uniform rhythm and/or rhyme. Send submissions to the editor c/o HARAMBEE FLAME; P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, NE; 68502-0500.

...

From Other Sources

DEVELOPMENTS IN REPARATIONS MOVEMENT

"Early next year Rep. John Conyers(D-MI) will introduce legislation authorizing a study to determine the damage done to African-Americans by 250 years of slavery and the subsequent deprivations of Jim Crow, and to recommend remedies. Widely dubbed the 'reparations bill', the legislation will make official the growing consensus among black leadership--spurred in part by the Supreme Court's flight from racial justice--that issues of U.S. racism must be framed in a broader historical context.

"Conyers' draft legislation makes no specific demands for reparations; instead it urges the U.S. to openly acknowledge slavery's evil and to form an interracial commission to examine its legacy...

"The Nation of Islam, the Republic of New Africa and other more extreme elements of the black movement have long demanded reparations for slavery--usually in the form of land--but in recent years the idea has caught on among a wider range of leadership. Jesse Jackson, for example, has been in the forefront of current discussion of the issue, and several church-based groups have also endorsed the concept. While these newer claims are less grandiose than the demands of the radicals, they share the same logic: the damage done to African-Americans must be systematically repaired...

"In the face of legislation granting reparations to Japanese-Americans, and various treaties(although frequently broken) with Native American nations, the legitimacy of compensation for slavery --certainly this country's ugliest moral stain--seems unasailable. The social dislocations that so plague the urban underclass seem clearly to stem from the monumental deprivations of the slave experience..."

-Passages on previous page excerpted from "Blacks Call For Reparations To Break Shackles Of The Past," which appears on page 6 of the Oct. 11-17 IN THESE TIMES(Chicago).

DRUGS: CAUSES, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONSEQUENCES

"...In the Black community the 'war on drugs' has raised the question of war against who? When the Federal Bureau of Prisons recently announced that it plans to build 20,000 new prisons over the next 15 years, many Blacks feel it is obvious who is expected to fill those jails. African-Americans are almost half of the prison population, which has nearly doubled in the last 10 years.

"The Black community is also the first victim of the growing suspension of civil liberties due to Bush's drug war. In Washington, nearly 200 Blacks were evicted after landlords claimed they were dealing drugs. Few drugs were found during the warrantless searches. Most of these tenants were in rent disputes with their landlords.

"The decision to target street-level dealers helps perpeturate the myth that the majority of traffickers and users are people of color. However, nationally, whites constitute about 76% of all illegal drug users...

"The current upsurge in drug trafficking and abuse in the Black community has mainly been driven by a complex web of economic need. Black males, particularly young ones, have been trapped in a cycle of poverty and unemployment. A 1985 Field Foundation study asserts that one-half of all Black men are chronically unemployed. Black youth unemployment, according to government statistics, has hovered around 35% for the last decade, but in reality is much higher.

"Cuts in aid for higher education in the past 10

years blocked one more avenue out of poverty. At the high school level, the dropout rate for young Black males is well above 50%...

"...the illegal narcotics industry has become a major (perhaps the major) employer of Black youth. Illegal drug-trafficking is the major economic activity in many Black and Latino neighborhoods...

"The drug epidemic has initiated a wave of violence and a health crisis of genocidal proportions. One in 30 Black males will be a murder victim.

"The drug crisis in the Black community has been labeled by some as 'chemical warfare' against Black people. Of drug-related emergency room patients, Blacks make up 50% of those admitted for heroin, 55% for cocaine and 60% for PCP. Blacks were 31% of all drug emergencies in 1985 and made up 25% of those in drug-treatment in 1987.

"Heroin use has accelerated the dramatic spread of AIDS in the Black community. Blacks constitute 37% of those who have contracted AIDS through I.V. drug use and 48% of those infected with the HIV virus through I.V. drug-using partners..."

-Excerpted from "Drug Crisis And 'Drug War' Batter Blacks," which appears on page 11 of the Oct. 25 THE GUARDIAN (New York).

ANOTHER PRIEST TURNS TOWARD AFRICA

(In a previous edition of the FLAME, we reported on developments regarding the establishment of the Imani Temple by Rev. George Stallings in Washington, D.C. Stallings, an American-born African priest of the Catholic Church, was suspended by his bishop for establishing the Temple without authorization from the Church hierarchy. In addition to starting the Temple, Stallings is pressing for the creation of an African-American rite within the Catholic Church. As you will see from the

following passages, George Stallings is not alone among African Catholic priests in his taking of the principle of self-determination to heart.)

"...Reverend Dr. Kwabena Damuah, a former Catholic priest...has cast off his cassock to found what he believes is not a new religion, but a return to an original, ancient African faith. His Afrikanian Mission is based on traditional African religious beliefs, notably the teachings of the Book of the Dead, written by black Egyptians in about 5,000 B.C., and preaches a respect and tolerance for humanity...

"'We must make it clear right from the start, that Afrikanian is not a new religion meant to Africanise Christianity. It is not a Christian religion. It is not a Muslim religion. It is not a branch of any foreign religion. Afrikanian is the ancient religion of Africa that is now revived. It takes the best of the new Africa to form a synthesis for the mutual benefit of world civilisation. It is neither fetish, pagan, nor idolatrous. It is a way of life that promotes godliness from the African perspective...'

"Rev Damuah points out that traditional African religion predates Christianity by thousands of years and was mankind's first recorded religion...

"Rev Damuah is particularly scathing in the manner in which Africa's rich history, and traditional religion, have been dismissed by 'amateur anthropologists, missionaries, colonial reporters, our own enemies and others. It is based on erroneous teachings such as racism, intellectual dishonesty, religious imperialism, fanaticism, ethnocentrism and religious bigotry. We are sick and tired of cultural imperialism and religious slavery. Every culture has the right to serve God according to its own rules'...

"As with all the great religions, Afrikanian bel-

ieves in a supreme diety. 'We believe in one God who is life, the Mystery of Mysteries, perfect in himself, without beginning and without end. There is no trinity, and Christ is not God. We believe that God is the centre of our life. He is everywhere by his power, presence and essence, and he knows, sees and hears everything. Everything is God's footprint, so there is no idol worship, and the honour we give to symbols and creatures goes back to God...'"

-Excerpted from "The Rebel Priest," which appears on pages 1597-1598 of the Sept. 25-Oct. 1 WEST AFRICA (London, Eng.).

NEW OLD BANKING SYSTEM SET UP IN NIGERIA

"A chain of People's Banks, set up to provide loans to the common man without security or collateral, was symbolically launched from Ajegunle, a Lagos slum, by President Babangida on October 3...

"The People's Bank, as a 'scheme for income generation and income redistribution', will make loans available to various trade and professional groups such as road-side mechanics, self-employed technicians, ferry traders, small-scale farmers, hairdressers and washermen and women. Official paper work would be kept to a minimum, while a minimal interest rate of five per cent would be charged to cover overheads and operating costs. Borrowers would be required to repay within a maximum period of one year, after which they would be free to take out another loan. To overcome the inaccesibility of conventional bank branches, the services of the new banks will be available 'in the field', where most small-scale businesses operate...

"He(President Babangida) dispelled doubts that loan recipients would not repay their debts, by pointing out that the 'esusu system', where a group of people pooled their resources to boost each other's businesses, was traditional."

-Excerpted from "Cash For Masses," which appears on page 1737 of the Oct. 16-22 WEST AFRICA(London).

AFRICAN STUDIES: THE PRESENT PICTURE

"...One of the biggest problems that many African studies centres(in the U.S.) face at the present time is that the opportunities for graduate students to visit Africa are becoming more limited. Most funding is restricted to doctoral research and yet most students need to be able to frame their research goals once they have had some exposure to Africa. Another problem is that most of the academic posts in African studies were filled in the decade 1965-75, with academics in the 30-45 year range. With retirement age extended to 70, most of these posts will not be available for a new generation of Africanists until well into the 1990s. As a result, some highly qualified Africanists are turning away from area studies...

"ReCent reports to Congress on the abysmal state of geographical and international knowledge among American high school and college students have stimulated interest in strengthening rather than restricting area studies in general...Several uni-

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versities are expanding their study abroad programmes in Africa...There are signs of increased private funding for African research, particularly in the humanities, because of an expanded interest in African art and the performing arts, but also in other areas such as food and agricultural policy, educational development and public health..."

-Excerpted from "The Pursuit Of Knowledge," which appears on pages 1761-1763 of the Oct. 23-29 WEST AFRICA(London, Eng.).

Beneath The Surface Noise

you just don't know
nor feel the anger hanging thick
in the troubled air
by voices strained beyond the comfort
of calm civility
YOUR comfort
your nostrils do not open wide enough
to smell the acrid steam
from forced breaths housing
loud words muffling
inward screams
your ears do not detect
they only hear the noisy shells
the outward explosions
but not the carnage
the terrible weeping.

-Mondo

Mad Dads Misguided?

We have been bombarded by media features on a group of African-Americans who call themselves "MAD DADS," "mad" being an acronym for "men against destruction." MAD DADS have attracted media attention through a number of activities and events, including: 1)providing foot-patrol for this year's Septemberfest(Last year during the event, a group of hoodlums attacked a number of folks created chaos); 2)painted over graffiti at various locations in the community; 3)proposed the use of a helicopter to scan potential street drug deals and/or other suspicious activities; 4)held a press conference to show off their $8,000 computer--telephone, dial machine, which equipment would allow households to receive and give information to MAD DADS related to drug and gang activity; 5)got Sam Walker, a Criminal Justice professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, to recant his statement that the helicopter idea was "silly."

As a life-long resident of the African-American community in Omaha, I am convinced that MAD DADS are misguided in their efforts and that their major purpose is that of acting as a conduit for the Omaha Police Department. Many in the African-American community have a problem with this because of the Dirty Harry type personalities on the force who've historically not been put in check. As of this date, Omaha does not have a civilian review committee nor has it adequately explained the circumstances of death of Richard Kellin or Kevin Watson. Such important issues have been pushed to the back burner as the Negro clergy and others have lost the fortitude to address them.

The city of Omaha spends millions of dollars on its police force. Officers are trained in maintaining "law and order"(Whose law and in what order?). Yet because many officers are busy sleeping under the shade of trees, making excessive use of telephones, and generally not practicing good

police work, the African-American community is supposed to supplement some lazy officers' performance of duty.

MAD DADS' modus operandi is to acquire as much publicity as possible in the shortest possible time. For example when Sam Walker called the helicopter idea "silly," emissaries of MAD DADS met with Walker and the dean of one of the colleges at U.N.O. Following this one-and-a-half-hour meeting, Walker emerged to make laudatory remarks about the same plan which he had previously scoffed at. This meeting and the professor's change of heart were covered in the WORLD HERALD. Beyond the matter of publicity, however, the fact that a supposedly serious group of African-Americans would spend such an amount of time on one white professor's opinion raises questions about the mind-set of these men. How much do they value our views?

The reader may think this writer has a bone to pick with MAD DADS. This is true. As a resident of the African-American community in Omaha, I have had enough of the Larry King, Jr. types and his compadres pimping the community. The community does not need gimmicks and gadgets to circumvent the real issues--quality education, employment, housing, and justice. Until MAD DADS address the systemic issues which create drug and gang problems in the African-American community, then one questions whether their name is a reflection of their psychological condition.

-A'Jamal Rashad Byndon

Editor's note: Since our receipt of the above letter, State Senator Ernie Chambers appeared on "Kaleidoscope" and made comments highly critical of the helicopter plan. Within little more than a day of the broadcast, it was quietly announced that MAD DADS had had second thoughts and that the helicopter-patrol plan was being shelved.

A'Jamal is an African social activist in Omaha.

Back In Time

Late one Saturday night I made some deliveries in a white neighborhood. I was pedaling my bicycle back to the store as fast as I could, when a police car, swerving toward me, jammed me into the curbing.

"Get down and put up your hands!" the policemen ordered.

I did. They climbed out of the car, guns drawn, faces set, and advanced slowly.

"Keep still!" they ordered.

I reached my hands higher. They searched my pockets and packages. They seemed dissatisfied when they could find nothing incriminating. Finally, one of them said: "Boy, tell your boss not to send you out in white neighborhoods after sundown."

...

As usual, I said: "Yes, sir."

-from Richard Wright's UNCLE TOM'S CHILDREN, copyright 1937. This autobiographical passage is printed here because, in view of incidents that have gone down in Bensonhurst, Howard Beach, Virginia Beach, and elsewhere, it illustrates just how much "progress" has been made.

Announcements

IMPORTANT NEW MAGAZINE

Last month we received the premier edition of AFRICAN COMMENTARY MAGAZINE. This first edition contained a fairly broad spectrum of very well written articles, as well as numerous handsome photos and graphics. We quote here from the magazine's promotional literature since, if the first edition is an accurate indication of things to come, it honestly portrays AFRICAN COMMENTARY:

> "AFRICAN COMMENTARY is 'a journal for people of African descent'--whether they are African-Americans, or Africans in Europe, the Caribbean, or in the homeland...
>
> "The goal of AFRICAN COMMENTARY is, in part, to ensure that Africa and the rest of the Black world step into the next century with dignity and a restored sense of initiative...
>
> "AFRICAN COMMENTARY is committed to reclaiming the rich heritage of Africa, and re-drawing the contours of African history. Beyond reclaiming the African past, the pages of AFRICAN COMMENTARY will be open to some of the best minds in Africa and the Black world to ponder the question of Africa's and its descendents' place in the world today."

For subscription and other information, write to: AFRICAN COMMENTARY; Attn: Suzette E.B. Hunte, Circulation Director; 29 Pray St.; Amherst, MA; 01002 Telephone: (413) 549-1934.

We encourage you to subscribe.

You may order Harambee Afrikan Cultural Org. KWANZAA cards at $3.50 per set of 7(with envelopes). See inside and outside of the back page.

KWANZAA Greeting Cards

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KWANZAA

(Dec. 26-Jan 1)

Umoja - Unity

Kujichagulia - Self-determination

Ujima - Collective Work & Responsibility

Ujamaa - Cooperative Economics

Nia - Purpose

Kuumba - Creativity

Imani - Faith

May this season of Kwanzaa move us to rededicate ourselves to those traditional African values by which our ancestors achieved greatness.